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AUTHOR Wardlow, Elwood M.
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ABSTRACT

Aimed at media professionals, students, and all others interested in better writing, this booklet is intended to share the wisdom on editing and writing distilled from the experience and thinking of the Associated Press Institute (API) staff and seminar attendees. Following an introduction, the booklet's first section--on writing--presents: essential elements in good writing such as clarity, style, and accuracy; the main steps for each story; a discussion on organizing the information when writing the lead and the story; lists of specific things writers can do to produce "quality" writing; the top 40 on the "enemies" list (such as wordiness, errors of fact, and confusing pronouns); useful formulas to gauge readability; suggestions for explaining difficult subjects; hints for writing a story as one writes a letter to an intelligent friend; points on spelling; ways to analyze what one reads; a brief discussion of buzz words and gobbledygook; suggestions for curing writer's block; discussion of the importance of a writing coach and of editing and rewriting; and a list of good books on writing and editing. The second, shorter section--on editing--focuses on the editor's tasks of tightening and polishing, offers headline techniques and guidelines for cutlines, tells how stories are selected, and gives information describing the American Press Institute. (EL)

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Effective Writing And Editing

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A Guidebook For Newspapers

American Press Institute

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About This Booklet

Members of the API staff undertake occasional research projects, sharing the results with journalism at large.

This booklet is the special project of Elwood M. (Woody) Wardlow, an API associate director. Many of the pieces are drawn from his observations during 31 years of newspapering.

Other passages are drawn from other persons or sources — sometimes in the original, sometimes edited or rewritten. Credit and acknowledgement are given to all such sources, and the Institute is grateful for their permission and encouragement.

Wardlow joined the API staff in 1980 after early retirement from the Buffalo Evening News, where he started in 1952 as a copy editor and spent the last ten years as managing editor for administration. After graduation from the University of Wisconsin School of Journalism (1948), he reported and edited at the Freeport (Ill.) Journal-Standard before going to Buffalo. He has taught journalism classes at the State University of Buffalo, Syracuse, St. Bonaventure and Canisius.

For Extra Copies

Additional copies of this booklet may be obtained from the American Press Institute, 11690 Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, Va. 22091 (telephone 703-620-3611). The charge is $2 per copy with your order, to cover printing, handling and mailing costs.

Introduction

The Goal: Doing a Better Job

As hundreds of newspaper people pass through the American Press Institute each year, a lot of fine conversation is shared around its conference tables.

When the Seminar members and discussion leaders depart, they inevitably leave some of that collected wisdom behind in the API files and notes.

Much of that rich collection relates to two cornerstones of journalism: writing and editing. This booklet is intended to (1) tap into the API accumulation, and the experience and thinking of the API staff; (2) focus and distill that; and (3) present it as a help and guide for all who cherish the language and want to improve their ability to use it.

The booklet is not intended as a writing or language primer; it is aimed at an audience that already has a high level of wordcraft. Neither, however, is it solely for media professionals; it is designed to be useful also to students and all others interested in better writing.

Alan Richman, assistant managing editor for writing at the Boston Globe, commented: "Most writers will gladly spend five days reporting a 1,200-word story, but they won't spend five hours writing it. I'm shocked at how little time they spend, even when they are not on deadline. Writing is hard work. It's time grown men and women were told this."

Readers of this booklet are hereby warned: It is not intended to be heavy reading — but it could lead to heavy work.

There are well over half a million words in the English language. Webster's Third International Dictionary lists 450,000, and you can add tens of thousands more by including compounds, slang, technical terms, regional idiom and the like. As a first language, English trails only Chinese — and it

has become the foremost second language. So those who write in English are fortunate beyond compare; they have a giant tool bag and a huge potential audience.

The average person is thought to be able to "recognize" 10,000 to 12,000 words. A well-read person might recognize 30,000 to 50,000, and be able to use one-third of that number. Journalists, on average, seem to have the largest working vocabulary of any vocational group — in the range of 20,000 words. Clergymen, doctors and lawyers use about 15,000, and skilled workers 5,000 to 7,000.

This booklet is organized along the lines of an old-time threshing ring. Before combines were invented, farm families would band together to buy a threshing machine. At harvest time, the machine and its owners would move from farm to farm in sequence.

At each place the work was divided. Some would drive their wide-bed wagons to the fields, pitch on the bundles of grain, and deliver the load to the ravenous thresher. Others would tend the machine, direct the straw blower, and deliver the crop to the granary.

So it is today in a newspaper's newsroom. The reporters are the harvesters, gathering the information and entering it into the newsroom processes. The editors make up the machine crew, discarding the chaff and placing the finished work in pages.

Thus it is that this booklet has two main sections — one devoted to writing, the other to editing.

Writing, editing. Every story two-steps its way down an interesting road. So will this booklet. We invite you to come along.

Essential Elements In Good Writing

Make it clear, make it interesting, make it right.

Clarity, style, accuracy. Those are the three keys to the magic kingdom of writing.

Let's look at them in detail.

Clarity

David Belasco, the great theatrical producer, said: "If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea."

A writer's job is to make things clear to the reader. Inability to do that signifies professional failure.

What are the main elements of clarity? Consider these:

—**Simplicity.** This should be at the top of the list. Jules Loh, a fine writer for the Associated Press, said: "A simple, declarative sentence is like a beautiful woman in a plain, black dress." Oldtime editor Arthur Brisbane, who knew a lot about newspapering, boiled it all down to this: "See a thing clearly and describe it simply. That is the essence of good newspaper work."

—**Directness, exactness, lucidity.** Make points, and make them concisely. Be specific; aim for crispness and precision. Strain out the mud. Unbend whatever is stiff. Saw up whatever is wooden. Declare war on equivocation and ambiguity. Regard abstract expressions as you would poison ivy.

—**Organization.** Start the story strongly, to encourage the reader to enter it. Unless the nature of the story suggests otherwise, use narrative — good old

story-telling — as your basic approach. As you proceed with one paragraph, think ahead to what the reader will want to know in the next; provide fluid linkages and transitions. Try to keep to a common theme throughout your story. Close strongly, not with unsorted odds and ends.

—**Particularizing.** On complicated passages, break up the elements into digestible chunks. Use examples; when you write about one, you write about all (as Stalin supposedly said, "Ten million deaths are a statistic, one death is a tragedy"). You can break your material into pieces, and shape the pieces into a numbered list. Or try the Q & A format, taking a nibble of the whole with each Q.

—**Parallels.** If you're writing on a dense topic, compare your subject with something within the reader's range of familiarity. Military strategy, for example, might be explained in terms of sports formations; corporate fiscal planning might be related to the family budget.

Novelist Somerset Maugham wrote: "There are two types of obscurity that you find in writers. One is due to negligence and the other to willfulness."

Avoid them both, of course. After every story, ask yourself: "If I were a complete stranger to this information, would I understand it?"

Style

Edith Hills Coogler, women's editor of the Atlanta Journal, told an API Seminar: "To write with mere clarity is to be a mere tradesman. To write with style is to be an artist."

Not every story lends itself to artistry, to be sure; to strive for literary effect on a minor sewer contract would be ludicrous. But a good writer watches for opportunity; like a batter at the plate, he'll take a full swing at the good pitches.

These are some of the main elements of style:

—**Vitality.** The active verb. The vivid adjective. A grace and dynamic that pull the reader along, giving the sense that the words have a worthwhile destination.

—**Human interest.** Every photographer knows that most pictures without people will wind up in the wastebasket. It's astonishing that many reporters haven't learned to people their stories — and even more astonishing that their editors let them get away with it.

—**Humor.** In the impersonal world of mass communications, this is the most personal form of expression. Give the readers a smile, and they'll be your friends all day. They'll also come back tomorrow. (A caution: Bad taste turns humor into a heavy liability; when in doubt, leave it out.)

—**Color.** Television cameras can show the actual scene, in living color; and often, to make sure nothing is missed, color commentary is added. Writers can't

match that easily, so they have to try harder to paint pictures in the reader's mind. "Color" covers a lot of ground: The senses of sound and smell, and sometimes of touch and taste. And of course, anything that can be seen: The sweep of movement; the details of dress, appearance, mannerism, background; the relationships among the people involved; the incongruities and oddities; and elements of time and distance. Color is more than adjectives; it is a total sense of scene.

—**Tone.** As you describe the color, also tell the mood. Was it a happy occasion? A confrontation? What attitudes, emotions and ambiance were at play? Often this will give the reader a keener sense of the story than anything else you write.

—**Quotes.** This is a wonderful way to present the story in human terms. Quotes are especially good when they *(a)* describe the action more vividly or accurately than you could yourself; *(b)* answer questions that would be asked by the reader; *(c)* offer glimpses of the speaker's personality; and (d) give a sense of immediacy and credibility to the story. (Caution: Never use a quote just because it is interesting or colorful; to be usable, it must advance the purposes of the story. Beware also the hazards of jargon and self-promotion.)

—**Elegance.** Sometimes, a story begs to take wing. When it does, the writer obliges, treating the reader to the upper reaches of journalistic fluency. The main elements of such virtuosity are usually *(a)* figures of speech; *(b)* analogies or anecdotes; *(c)* imaginative phrasings or poetic touches; *(d)* change of pace; and *(e)* an emotional quotient. Remember, always, the watchwords of restraint and understatement; too much richness is florid. Use the ear as well as the eye to tell you what is right.

—**Style itself.** Use a consistent pattern in the spelling, capitalization, punctuation and other basics of your writing (see the stylebook chapter elsewhere in this booklet). It's like paving the road for the readers, removing the bumps on which they might stumble.

Accuracy

The writer and the reader need each other. The writer is nothing without an audience, and the reader enters a story with the expectation of worthwhile yield. The heaviest responsibility rests with the writer; if he betrays the reader's expectations with errors or inexactness, he destroys their joint enterprise.

Accuracy has two faces:

1. ***Factual correctness.*** Getting it right.

2. ***Credibility.*** Getting right with the reader.

Both are essential. John A. Scott, former head of the Gannett Foundation, put the issue well:

"Would you, facing brain surgery, submit to a doctor who made only a few

mistakes every day? An imperative is that newspapers once again be accepted as chronologies of objective history and that people once again say: 'It's got to be true, I read it in the newspaper.' "

A. FACTUAL CORRECTNESS

Errors of fact are usually traceable to sloppiness, laziness, gullibility or ignorance.

Careful research and checking before you write, and a careful rereading and rechecking afterward, are the best safeguards.

These are some of the main elements in factual inaccuracy:

—**Guessing.** Writers earn a large part of their keep from what they know and what they comprehend. If you aren't certain, either check it out or leave it out. Never guess; your own ignorance isn't worth passing along to others.

—**Numbers.** Double-check all numbers, and double-check your arithmetic. Raw numbers are often meaningless; try to give a comparison with last year, or a percentage of increase or decrease, or some other suitable handle. Try also to indicate what the number might mean to the reader individually — in cost, safety, convenience, influence or other relevant standard. On counts and totals, attribute the number to someone else if you didn't do the counting yourself.

—**Names.** Whenever possible, check with the best source — the person who owns the name. Make sure you heard him right, and copied it down correctly. Secondarily, turn to a reliable directory. Never trust public-relations handouts, or the word of a third party, without verification.

—**Dates and places.** At the instant you write a date, take a quick look at the calendar. When writing about a place, check a map. Surround yourself with such reference materials; they are not only useful, but they give others confidence in your professional intentions.

—**Quotes.** Is that really what the source said? Would your notes be clear and complete enough to stand up in court? If not, check or paraphrase.

—**Personal experience.** If you're reporting on a new product, service or facility, did you try it out yourself — or are you taking the word of someone else?

—**Omission of vital facts.** Have you given the exact location for the distribution of food and clothing to flood victims? Did you mention what sport was being played when the Tigers beat the Lions? Did you mention the depth of the water when the car went off the bridge, or the salary the embezzlement suspect is earning? Reread your story through the eyes of strangers, and ask yourself the questions they would ask.

—**Haste.** A frequent excuse for error is, "I didn't have time to check it." Any editor who accepts such excuses will hear, sooner or later, from the fellow who

owns the Brooklyn Bridge.

—**Hoaxes.** Rare is the newspaper that hasn't been taken in. Eternal skepticism is the best protection. If a story, or a fact, is almost too strange or wonderful to believe, then don't believe it until you have verification.

—**Technical errors.** Special care is needed in stories about science, law, medicine, engineering, finance and the like. Give yourself extra time for research — and then cross-check your facts with reliable groups or individuals in those fields.

—**Eternal no-nos:** Fabrication, altered context, distortion, misrepresentation, insinuation, malice, innuendo, gossip, rumor, exaggeration, hearsay, inference. They all have high cost and low yield.

—**Corrections.** Almost every newspaper now has a formal procedure for acknowledging error and making corrections. Often there is a specific page or section where this is done. For a long time many newspapers resisted routine corrections; they didn't want the readers to know they made mistakes. Somehow the readers noticed anyway, and things have changed. Corrections are still bad news — but good policy. (Note: Newspapers usually confine corrections to errors of fact, or to serious misinterpretations. Where the issue can be argued, they invite the complainer to write a letter to the editor.)

B. CREDIBILITY

What is truth? For news writers, story after story must answer that most eternal and difficult question.

It calls for the finest journalistic skills. Public consensus is only as good as the information on which it's based, so the people supplying the information have a heavy task.

What are we talking about when we explore credibility? We're talking about the aiming of a story, and its aptness, and its believability.

These are the primary elements:

—**Factual correctness**, of course.

—**Completeness.** The average newspaper contains 10 to 20 times as many words as the average half-hour telecast, so it can offer coverage that is far more complete. It can carry more stories, and plane into them far more deeply. If a newspaper isn't thorough, it isn't making the most of one of its best advantages.

Weave background and meaning into your stories. Give the readers an informational menu based on broad variety and good portions, so they'll never starve if they cast their lot with you.

One good way to achieve this is at the beginning, when you are gathering the

information. After you ask the questions related to who, when, what, where, why and how, be sure to ask two more: "What next?" and "Anything else?" That extra dimension of material, the extra range of insight, will give the reader the sense that you went beyond the basics, and that your story is complete.

One final thought: Most of your audience is not just like you. Remember those who are younger or older; those who have different ways of life, and those who hold different thoughts or values. Respect them all, and try to write with all of them in mind.

—**Relevance.** You don't publish ski sections in Florida, and you do in Colorado. Unfortunately, most news judgments are more difficult than that. In taking aim at the reader, keep these factors in mind:

(a) ***Research.*** There is an ocean of information readily available to help you know your community better. To give your news judgment better focus, try these sources: The Census Bureau; the federal and state labor departments; the federal and state commerce departments; your county clerk's office, and perhaps the sociology department of your local college.

(b) ***Timeliness.*** Try to keep ahead of the news, or at least abreast of it. If you're out of date, you're out of focus.

(c) ***Localness.*** Hit 'em where they live, with a heavy diet of news about themselves and their neighbors. On stories from other parts of the world — especially Washington, New York or your state capital — consider adding a few sentences on what impact the news might have in your town.

(d) ***Perspective and significance.*** As often as you can, tell what brought each major development about; what importance it has; and what it might mean to your readers. If such analysis and explanation get deeply into commentary, be sure to label it as such.

(e) ***Special treats.*** A newspaper is an organ of mass communication, so print a large amount of information of interest to everybody. For special audiences — rock-music lovers, gardeners, boat owners, or whatever — add another level of material aimed directly at them. It's another way of telling the readers that whatever they're interested in, you're interested in it too.

—**Taste.** Readers by and large are patient people; they'll forgive and forget a lot. The one thing they won't forget, and in fact will scream about, is bad taste.

This goes beyond simple vulgarity, profanity and obscenity. Actually, in those areas most newspapers are on higher ground than television, movies and books.

These are the areas that take special care:

(a) ***Race, sex, religion and national origins.*** The writer needs to be sensitive

and sure-footed. Humor isn't forbidden in this area, but don't try it unless you know exactly what you're doing — and avoid wisecracks, facetiousness and sarcasm at all costs.

(b) ***Squeamishness.*** Life is real; there are gruesome creatures, and spilled blood, and agonizing experiences. But if you push your portrayal of such matters to illogical limits, you will disgust many of your readers.

(c) ***Sensationalizing.*** Every reporter has heard it often: "You hype your stories so you can sell more papers." The meaning is, "You play some things up beyond their real importance, and so are an unreliable source of information." The only known antidote: Special care to avoid exaggeration, dubious interpretation, undue emphasis or unwarranted display. Develop a good set of brakes; put crime, sex and the bizarre into perspective.

—**Fairness.** This subject is worth a whole shelf of books. What follows touches only a few of the central aspects:

(a) ***Be open with the reader.*** In person and in print, take the trouble to describe how you gather information, and select and process stories. Tell what goals you have for your news coverage, and the criteria you use.

(b) ***Be honest and objective.*** Don't get hung up on how to define those words; they mean nothing more, and nothing less, than that you will try to give every reader a fair shake on every story.

(c) ***Strive for balance.*** Do your best to compass all points of view, and the whole range of sources. If one side in a controversy isn't available or won't respond, say so. That's at the heart of believability.

(d) ***Have a formal correction policy.*** Print it from time to time, so that readers are familiar with it. Tell not only what was wrong, but why it was wrong. Apologize when necessary.

(e) ***Consider an ombudsman*** or special friend for the reader to call — someone who will explain, not alibi, and carry through when that is needed.

(f) ***Develop a reader access policy.*** Reach out for letters to the editor — and print, often, what the rules are. Restrict the use of editor's notes; you don't have to have the last word. Invite guest columns from a variety of public leaders, and people with important or interesting jobs. Give the readers the feeling that they can be heard.

(g) ***Give ample attribution.*** Where did you get your information? Tell the readers, so they can gauge its worth. Make the attribution specific — not "a police source said," but "Commissioner John Jones said." If your source is a little-known group, give the group's credentials.

(h) ***Avoid slogans and labels.*** Often they are simplistic, inaccurate or incomplete. A person might be an economic conservative, but quite progressive in social attitudes. Let the reader know your sources by what they say and do, not by what you call them.

(i) ***Have the courage to kill a story that fails.*** Often, investigative reporters will hit a dry well; their suspicions are unfounded, or unprovable. But there is an urge to publish *something*, to justify the time and expense. That's a mistake; write the story off, or put it on the shelf for another look later.

(j) ***Develop legal perspective.*** The First Amendment is a splendid guarantee of freedom — but it doesn't give news people an exemption from the law. Writers, in the exercise of their own rights, must still respect the rights and well being of others. Libel and privacy are especially troublesome areas. The two traditional points of legal advice are: Be aware, and take care. (For sound advice, see the following: (1) "Synopsis of the Law of Libel and the Right of Privacy," a fine booklet by attorney Bruce W. Sanford that has sold more than 50,000 copies and is available from World Almanac Publications in New York; and (2) the Associated Press Style Book, which has a nicely focused legal section.)

—**Professionalism.** What the reader most wants to know about you is, "Can I trust you, and what you're telling me?"

How do you give reassurance? Consider these aspects:

(a) ***Manners and appearance.*** In person or on the telephone, respect the feelings and purposes of others.

(b) ***Standards.*** Every professional journalism association has developed an ethics guideline. Most newsrooms also have codes, and every individual should have one of his own. All three should be essentially compatible, and should emphasize *(a)* objectivity; *(b)* the building of trust; *(c)* the avoidance of conflicts of interest or compromising activities; and *(d)* service to the community and to the readers.

(c) ***Attitude.*** Whatever newspaper you are working for, in whatever town with whatever set of readers, is the one that deserves your full attention and effort. If you're playing in the minor leagues at the moment, you're still expected to do your best; you'll be a loser if you look to tomorrow's big game and neglect the one you're playing in today.

(d) ***Perspectives.*** Sometimes reporters become caught up in the thrill of the chase. They fall victim to the Hounddog Syndrome, and come to regard the world as their quarry. They look only for warts, never for beauty marks. The opposite of this is the Goody-Two-Shoes Syndrome; it afflicts those who find little to fault in this best of all possible worlds. Keep in mind, always, that each day on our planet is filled with both darkness and light.

—**Personalization.** You can not only enter your readers' minds — you can also enter their lives. Some suggestions:

(a) ***Usefulness.*** No one is living in Utopia or Shangri-la. The readers can use a heavy dose of advice and help. Tell them how they can understand things better, and cope more effectively, and you can give them no finer gift.

(b) ***Access.*** Show them how to use the paper more effectively. How can they distinguish between news and editorials? How can they submit news items of their own? Tell them how the newspaper is manufactured, and how it reaches their homes. Give them the backgrounds of the people whose bylines they depend upon for information.

(c) ***Fun.*** The computer people have invented a wonderful term to describe some of their machines: "User friendly." What it means is, "Try it, you'll like it." Newspapers, too, can offer entertainment, games, humor, friendship, personal glimpses, human interest. They should never miss a reasonable opportunity to do so, and they should make it as user friendly as possible.

(d) ***When appropriate, write it from the heart.*** A long-ago newspaper on a long-ago day (the New York Sun, March 16, 1890) made the case exceptionally well:

"You don't find feelings in written words unless there were feelings in the person who used them. With all their apparent independence they seem to be little vessels that hold in some puzzling fashion exactly what is put into them. You can put tears into them, as though they were so many little buckets; and you can hang smiles along them, like Monday's clothes on the line, or you can starch them with facts and stand them up like a picket fence; but you won't get the tears out unless you first put them in. . . . It isn't the way the words are strung together that makes Lincoln's Gettysburg Address immortal, but the feelings that were in the man. But how do such little, plain words manage to keep their grip on such feelings? That is the miracle."

The Main Steps For Each Story

The writer follows these five steps sequentially in each story:

1. **Developing the idea or assignment.** Is there a story there? How should it be dealt with? (Remember the advice of Clive Barnes, New York Post critic: "You've got to have an inbuilt virginity in approaching each new story.")

2. **Developing the information.** What records should be checked? Who should be interviewed? How much can be done by phone, and what must be done in the street? Do you already have some of the information in your files, or in your library? How much information is enough?

3. **Evaluating and organizing.** Is there still a story there? What information is at the center of your subject, and what is at the edges? What is outside the edges? What would be of greatest interest and usefulness to the readers? How should it be organized, and at what length? What is the lead, and what is the ending? Are there legal or ethical implications? All of that should be thought through before you begin writing. Never let the story take you where it will.

4. **Writing.** This is the heart of it. Writing involves a combination of message and medium. A good story needs a good telling. The telling can be gauged by how well it fulfills the three main requirements of clarity, style and accuracy.

5. **Rewriting, self-editing.** Regard your first effort as a first draft. Go back through it at least once — and again and again, if necessary — to file down the rough edges, fill in the cracks, straighten the lines, give it character.

That sequence is like a chain. If there is a weak link, the story will suffer.

Most reporters are probably strongest on the second step — the legwork to dig up the information.

They are probably weakest on the fourth and fifth steps. It's not a matter of competence, but of care. To use a hunting analogy, it's more fun to catch the rabbit than to cook it.

From the reader's standpoint, greater emphasis is needed on writing.

A good rule of thumb is this: However much time you spend on the five steps, at least a quarter of it — and preferably a third — should be given to the last two.

Organizing Your Information, Writing the Lead and the Story

Some writers do it on paper, some in their heads — but good ones always organize their material before they begin to write.

Three basic questions must be answered on each story:

1. *What type of lead?*
2. *What manner of telling?*
3. *Third person, or first?*

Let's explore each of those questions, in turn.

The First Paragraph

The purpose of the lead is to bring the reader into the story in a smooth, inviting way. Of the basic types of leads, the most frequently used are these:

A. *Summary, or an overview of the action/results/impact.* For example: "The City Council in a close vote approved a $100 million budget this morning. The budget, up $10 million from last year, will raise the average homeowner's taxes by $142."

There you have the main elements of this story: *Who* (the Council), *What* (approved the budget), *When* (this morning) and *How* (close vote). The next few paragraphs should give more details on those elements and also tell *Why* (the pros and cons) and *Where* (which in this case is not central but should be mentioned in describing the scene and reporting the public turnout).

Most summary leads have three or four of those six key elements. Don't strain to include all six; often the result is too heavy. Let the second and third paragraphs carry some of that weight.

B. *Singular.* This type of lead emphasizes one important aspect. For example: "If you are an average homeowner within the city, your real-estate taxes are going up $142 next year."

C. *Dramatic.* Example: "Councilman David Jones paused for a long moment this morning when it was his turn to vote on the proposed $100-million city budget. The tally was three to three, and he was the tie-breaker. In the hushed room, his voice was barely audible as he decided it: 'Aye.' "

D. *Quote.* Example: " 'The city needs so many things,' Councilman David Jones said in explaining his stand on the new city budget. 'There was no way around it. I had to vote in favor.' "

E. *Color, scene, description.* Example: "Mayor Brown seemed to have stopped breathing. His face was drawn, his hands tightly clenched. The City Council was voting on his proposed budget, containing all his hopes for the

coming year, and he knew it would be close."

F. *Delayed.* This lead is usually personalized or based on an example, such as: "William and Dorothy Smith were in the audience this morning when the City Council approved a $100 million budget for next year. They had a good idea of what to expect — a higher tax bill, and the likelihood that they'll have to put off buying new carpeting."

G. *Reaction/follow-up/what next?* Example: "Petitions for a recall election aimed at ousting Mayor Brown were being circulated this afternoon, only hours after the City Council approved his new budget calling for higher taxes."

H. *Analysis.* Example: "Mayor Brown won the budget battle, but could end up losing his office."

I. *Situation report.* Example: "With the annual budget battle over, this is the city's financial picture for the coming year:"

J. *Question.* Example: "What would have happened if Councilman David Jones had voted 'nay' instead of 'aye' on the mayor's proposed budget?"

K. *The crackler,* sometimes with only one or two words: "Up go the taxes."

There are many other types of leads, among them: Surprise, contrast, teasers, coming events, statistical, anecdotal, narrative and flashback.

In choosing the type of lead, you might try writing three or four and then deciding which is most suitable. Keep these things in mind:

1. Is the story fresh? If so, what is the best way to tell the highlights quickly? If it happened yesterday, what's the best way to make it interesting today?
2. Is it a straightforward story, or complex?
3. Is it based on people, or on events?
4. How much is the reader likely to know about the situation already?
5. What is the reader's stake in it?

Whatever type you choose, avoid the cute and the precious. Lean toward being informative rather than dazzling.

Organizing the Rest of the Story

Now that you've written the lead, how do you tell the rest of the story?

The challenge is to organize the pieces into an interesting and coherent whole. That can't be left to chance; you need a plan.

The traditional approach to detailed development of a news story is the inverted pyramid. The freshest, most important information is at the top, trailing away to the less central or less interesting facts at the bottom.

Such structure is usually convenient for the reader. He or she can get the

main facts quickly, and then leave the story at any point without missing key elements.

But when the writer makes importance the main criterion in structuring the story, chronology and narrative can get twisted. Time elements become distorted. The relationships between different parts of the story can blur. On complex stories, the inverted pyramid is a stern test of writing skill.

Within the pyramid, the flow of information can take many shapes. Perhaps the closest to a "normal" form is this:

1. A summary lead, based on new developments.
2. Two to four more paragraphs giving more details on those new developments.
3. A background or tieback paragraph, relating the new developments to the overall significance or to what had gone before. Ths is usually no lower than the sixth paragraph.
4. Additional reportage of the new developments.
5. Additional background or perspective.

Other forms of story organization include:

A. *Chronological.* After the lead, the story is told largely in the order the events took place.

B. *Serial or episodic.* After the lead, itemize the main parts 1-2-3-4, and then explore each in turn. The ending should tie them all together.

C. *Delayed.* A scene-setting introduction or example precedes the events of the story. Don't delay long, or the reader will drift away.

D. *Suspense.* A reverse twist on the inverted pyramid is the surprise ending. Here you tell the happenings, but hold back the results — until the final paragraph. It can't be used often, but keep it in mind for events that take surprising or humorous paths.

E. *Feature.* Your purpose here is to convey impressions as well as information. Time factors are less intense, and the personal or human-interest quotient is usually greater. You are trying to draw a picture in the reader's mind. Stake out a central premise, state it early and maintain it throughout. Around that central premise lace together enough insights, anecdotes, analogies, examples, quotes and descriptions to make the picture whole.

F. *Analysis* usually follows this form: *(a)* a description of the problem; *(b)* an account of the people involved and the sides they have taken; and *(c)* thoughts on what might happen next, and with what impact. Commentary takes analysis a step further; the writer, or the publication, takes sides too.

G. *Columns and reviews.* The forms here are without number. Anything goes, so long as it relates to the reader, serves the writer's purpose, and is done well.

In structuring stories, it could help to ask yourself these questions:

1. Is there a specific theme to which you should stay close?
2. If some elements aren't close to that theme line, should you *(a)* try to weave them in anyway; *(b)* break them out into separate stories; or *(c)* scrap them?
3. Will quotes and dialogue help the story flow, and provide good linkages? Is there a place for Q and A?
4. Can listings and itemizing firm up the story line?
5. Do you have, or can you get, anecdotes and examples?
6. Is there a need for balanced passages — charge and rebuttal, point and counterpoint, this versus that? Can such conflict or contrast be focused effectively?
7. What is the headline for this story likely to say? Is the structure you have in mind in step with the sense of that headline?
8. Can the story be mapped? On complicated stories, try drawing a diagram much as you would draw your family tree. In telling about a major bank robbery, write "holdup" in a circle at the center. Draw a line out from the circle and label it "bank." Draw branches off the main line for location, size, personnel, previous holdups, nature of security, etc. Draw another major line from the circle for the criminals, and branches for what you know about them — and other main-line-and-branch systems for other major components of the story. Often the development of your story structure will be simplified by such a process.

Third Person or First?

Most newspaper stories are written in the third person. The writer gives an account, but doesn't enter in.

First person is usually reserved for these situations:

1. Columns. As the writer develops into a public personality, the "I" comes more easily and more naturally.
2. Vivid, dramatic experiences in which the writer was involved: "As the funnel cloud roared nearer, my mind was racing but my legs seemed unable to move."

First person can be a rousing way to tell a story. Make sure, though, there is really a story there — something within the readers' frame of reference. They'll be interested in what you saw at the five-alarm fire, but not in how you spent your summer vacation.

Lists of Specifics: Things You Can Do

"Good writing is more than creative typing," Wall Street Journal reporter David M. Shribman told the members of an API seminar. "It is telling that life has depth and meaning, that there are milestones in human commerce. Get your papers closer to your readers' lives."

That comment is a sign of our times. Throughout the newspaper world and in most communications schools, there is renewed emphasis on quality writing — and good advice on how to provide it.

What follows is some of the best counsel, most of it taken from the files of API:

C. A. (Pete) McKnight, longtime editor of the Charlotte Observer, on how to overcome writing difficulties:

1. Use short, simple words. If your writing runs more than 165 syllables per 100 words, you are writing only for college graduates.

2. Use more one-syllable words. Make them your workhorse words. Make them carry the biggest load. Of 275 words in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, 196 are only one syllable.

3. Use familiar words. The Bible uses a vocabulary of only 6,000 words.

4. Use personal words. Your stories will come to life when you sprinkle in a generous supply of such words as you, girl, mother, doctor, teacher, Joe, Susie, baby.

5. Use concrete words — ones that make the reader see, hear, feel, smell or taste.

6. Make every word work. Use fewer words. Use them with greater force. Go through one day's writing after it's printed. Cross out every unnecessary word, confusing phrase, garbled sentence, involved paragraph. Then continue to do that every day — in advance of printing.

7. Avoid technical words. Non-technical words are clearer, and will build a broader base of readership for you.

8. Create figures of speech. Build them into everyday writing. Feed new ones in as old ones wear out.

9. Use short sentences. They are the lifeblood of simple, easy-to-read writing. If a sentence runs upward of 30 words, break it up. Even a one-word sentence can be forceful, emphatic, arresting.

10. Make sentences active. Put a taboo on passives. Active verbs give

action to writing, passives bog it down.

11. Use short, simple paragraphs. Most should introduce or contain only one idea. Most should also have only one source or viewpoint.

12. Write to one person. Write every story or feature as if you were talking to one man, to one woman, to one child. Picture this person sitting right in front of you as you talk. Talk to that person in familiar language, words used every day.

13. Work with one basic idea. Cover many points, but build them on the framework of one idea. That can make even a complex subject easy to read about.

14. Try to write affirmatively. Keep your viewpoint constructive. There is always a "yes" viewpoint in every "no" situation.

Malcolm F. Mallette of the API staff:

A. Where applicable, explain to the readers how the news will affect them.

B. Don't use a complicated word where a simple word will do, even though the reader may understand both.

C. Use the precise word, the exact word, and no other.

D. Be sure you say what you mean to say. The writer sees only what you put on paper, not what may be in your mind.

E. Remove all small stumbling blocks to the reader's immediate understanding. Avoid jargon, unusual words, foreign words and phrases.

F. Tell the story in terms of the people making the news (not the impersonal Embassy, but the human being who is Ambassador).

G. Try to take the reader to the scene. Use specific details whenever possible. Let the subject's actions spell out his personality and appearance ("he laid down his pipe" is more vivid than "he smokes a pipe").

H. Use figures of speech, especially similes and metaphors.

I. Strive for freshness. Phrasings that sound familiar to you will be stale for the readers, too. If you suspect it's a cliche, it probably is; rewrite it or omit it.

J. Avoid strain, gush and euphemisms. If you have to repeat a word, do so rather than strain for a substitute.

K. Cultivate an ear for quotes, and use them as often as they are central to the story. Make sure the quotes are in character with the source, and in the context intended.

L. Use statistics, but in a support role, not center stage. Don't reduce a dramatic situation to dusty arithmetic.

M. Leave no unanswered questions, and provide enough background to suffice the reader who hasn't seen earlier stories. But remember, too, that extraneous information should be eliminated.

N. Respect the readers' requirements. They usually read in haste, and want a quick reward from their reading.

J. Montgomery Curtis, former executive director of API:

1. Describe people precisely. Not only a truck driver, but what kind of a truck. Not just a "captain," but which service; and not just the "Army," but which branch. Not just "husky," but "6 foot 2, 190 pounds and muscular." Make the reader see the people.

2. Define little-known organizations. How many readers know the nature of The Deanery Council, The Cosmic Federation of the Paturi, The American Press Institute? If you think something is too well known to require definition, consider how many youngsters and people new to your community have become readers during the last year or so.

3. A long story doesn't need a long lead. Try just the opposite — a short lead to get the reader in gently, with the thought that it's going to be easy.

Red Smith, renowned sports columnist:

A. Create in the reader the impression that you were there. You saw, you heard.

B. Never fake. The reader knows when you are stretching the truth.

C. Use no slang, except to make a point in quotes. No cliches, same exception.

D. Don't be pompous, not even authoritative. Don't strut.

E. Don't base your facts on your opinions.

F. Be relentlessly accurate. Know that some sources are lying, or at least exaggerating. Never let them know that you know that.

G. Always check back with sources on complex situations.

H. If humor comes naturally, fine. But don't strain for it.

Steve Lovelady of the Philadelphia Inquirer, on story ideas:

1. Go through your own paper for the hidden story — things that are buried or kissed off. Make it a treasure hunt.

2. Localize the wires. What do the Washington developments mean to your town?

3. Read other newspapers. What is happening in those towns is probably happening in your town too.

4. If something happens to you, it's happening to others also. Never turn off your own antenna; you are a paid observer, so earn your pay. Change your route to work often, looking for new aspects of your community.

5. Poke into the obvious. Now and then look at everything with a fresh eye. Don't take any situation for granted. Update old stories that seem worn out.

6. Look for trends, as well as stories. Catch the issues while they are still boiling up.

7. Ask all the people you meet what they know, and what they want to see in the paper.

8. If story conferences put you to sleep, so will the stories. Try brainstorming for alternatives.

Dick Dougherty, columnist for the Rochester Times-Union:

A. When you get a story under way, refrain from interrupting the flow. Avoid digression. Don't go parenthetical.

B. If writer's block arises, stay at the typewriter. The mind will organize itself past the problem. Something will snap into place.

C. Don't try to make a masterpiece out of everything. On lots of stories, just state the facts and get the story told.

D. Remember that on some stories you don't have to compose a lead. It's there already; just set it down.

Steve M. Wilson, managing editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press & Dispatch:

1. Few stories are clear enough. Words and ideas are understood differently by different people; distortion between the writing and the reading takes place in any story. The goal is to minimize it.

2. Most stories are too long. Mark Twain apologized to a friend: If I'd had more time, I would have written a shorter letter. Fewer words can convey more information. Lean writing also makes room for other news.

3. Most series are too long and have too many parts. A series should be evaluated as any story would, independent of how much time and effort was spent producing it.

4. Too many stories are written for editors and news sources. The best reporters imagine their stories being read by a neighbor or any ordinary reader.

Edith Hills Coogler of the Atlanta Journal:

A. Leads that ask questions are weak. Leads that ask readers to imagine something are weak. Put your reader directly into a situation and take it from there.

B. For feature writing, there is only one rule: Be seductive. Look for anything odd, arresting, colorful, poignant or funny. Seize on incongruities; they are fun.

DeAnn Evans, managing editor of the Deseret News in Salt Lake City:

"Some writers have the philosophy that once the lead is written, the rest of the story will simply flow. The result is often a rambling, repetitive story. The

answer, of course, lies in spending a little time to plan the story's organization. It usually consists of a couple of main ideas and a few key points placed in logical order. Such an outline provides a route map for the writer."

John Walter, on newswriting premises for the newspaper USA Today:

SLICE — Broad topics CAN be handled, but must be handled by slicing off a very narrow focus that throws light on the topic as a whole. A profile cannot wander over 15 elements of the personality; it must hit THE element that is central to the person, bringing in the others in passing.

DIRECT — The customary opening anecdote is tossed or stripped to lead directly to the main point of the piece — in the second sentence, for example. Any approach that does not get directly to the main thread by the second graf is doomed.

SPEED — The cumulative effect of the story approach, word usage, sentence structure and specific example has to speed the reader through the story. The good forms compel the reader to go on to the next sentence.

HARDNESS — After the challenge to be specific, flabbiness is the next most common problem — weak humor where no humor would be better, quotes that wander when partial quotes would work, long official titles instead of paraphrased ones, long words where short ones will do.

Lee Hills, longtime Knight-Ridder news executive, on ways to put warmth in your writing:

A. Remember that the entreaty, "Tell me a story, please," is made by adults as well as small children. So don't give them an article. Try giving them a story.

B. Tell the story in terms of people, rather than issues, if that is possible. There was an issue or a moral in the experience of Little Red Riding Hood — but the story told in terms of the issue would be deadly dull.

C. The reporter must search for warm, personal words. "My Ronnie" tells more than "my son, Ronald J., Jr., 8½, a student in the Umphill School."

D. The reporter, however hard-boiled, must keep his emotional strings vibrating in harmony with those of mankind. If the story warrants, don't blunt your emotional responses.

E. Don't be content with the conventional. And where there is a choice, always follow the story that promises human interest.

Erling H. Erlendson, California State University (Northridge) journalism professor:

1. The newsman talks and thinks in terms of the verbs, "buy," "try," "expect," "use," "ask," and "get," but when he sits down and writes the words come out "purchase," "attempt," "anticipate," "utilize," "request" and "obtain." Write with the same words you talk with. Use some contractions.

But be sure the meaning of every word is exact.

2. Back into very few sentences. Come right out and say what you want to: subject-verb-object.

3. Try to avoid internal punctuation in the first sentence of your lead.

4. Usually start with a name only if the person is well known. Otherwise, identify him by a general term in the first sentence and put the name in the next sentence or paragraph.

5. Use transitions. Don't confuse your reader by jumping from one place or topic to another without a bridge. The time-worn "meanwhile" should be used only as a last resort. Block paragraphs with summary sentences at the beginning make for easy reading.

6. Put time adverbs ("today" and "last night") in their natural place.

Listen to What Your Ears Tell You

Writers need acute sensitivity to the nuances of form and meaning.

The eye is their main tool for that. Sometimes a writer seems able to spot errors at a glance from several feet away; his eye is offended by an irregularity.

The ear is also an important tool for the writer. A tin ear is a severe handicap; a strong sense of meter, rhythm and emphasis is a great help.

Whenever you can, read your finished story and imagine how it would sound on the ear. Better yet, read it out loud — and if it doesn't sound right, it surely needs fixing. Never be self-conscious about speaking your lines.

For ear practice, try the lines below. They were developed by Dr. Ernest Brennecke of Columbia University. He inserted the word "only" in eight different positions in a basic sentence and came up with eight different cadences and eight different meanings.

Only I hit him in the eye yesterday.
I *only* hit him in the eye yesterday.
I hit *only* him in the eye yesterday.
I hit him *only* in the eye yesterday.
I hit him in *only* the eye yesterday.
I hit him in the *only* eye yesterday.
I hit him in the eye *only* yesterday.
I hit him in the eye yesterday *only*.

Make it "The city council voted last night to . . ." instead of "The city council last night voted to. . ."

Ed Orloff of the San Francisco Examiner:

A. Too many reporters are acting as secretaries rather than reporters. They feel they have to give a blow-by-blow account of everything they hear.

B. The great and simple truth is that you are your own best editor, at least you should be. If you don't have the time to have a story checked by a severe critic, then you must find the time to go over your own copy.

C. The next time you write a story, go over it and see how many words you can cut out. If you can't eliminate at least 10 per take of 250 words, you're not really a good self-editor.

Richard Thien, executive editor of the Sioux Falls (S.D.) Argus Leader:

1. Watch for split verbs. Most of us talk in split verbs: "The Egyptians had been clearly apprehensive," or 'He had never taken a pill." It should be: "The Egyptians clearly had been apprehensive," and "He never had taken a pill." Get adverbs out from between two-word verbs. The sequence is: subject, adverb if necessary, verb and object.

2. Avoid "partial" quotes. They "get in the way," of the reader, often "imparting" a meaning to words "not intended" by the "writer." Do you know what I "mean?"

James H. Couey, Jr., of the Birmingham (Ala.) News: "The best writing is the writing which the reader follows effortlessly, without being conscious of the writer's words. Complex words slow down the reader, perhaps, but complex sentences practically put him in reverse. . . . Chief Justice Holmes is reported to have written his opinions standing up, commenting that 'nothing conduces to brevity like a caving in of the knees.' "

Turner Catledge, while executive editor of the New York Times: "Approach every story as if you were writing a letter to an individual reader who knows nothing about the subject with which you are dealing."

From a Time Magazine editor's note: "The basis of good Time writing is narrative, and the basis of good narrative is to tell events (1) in the order in which they occur; (2) in the form in which an observer might have seen them — so that readers might imagine themselves at the scene."

From "Alice in Wonderland": "The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. 'Where should I begin, please your majesty?' he asked. 'Begin at the beginning,' the King said, very gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end; then stop.' "

The Top 40 on the Enemies List

Know your enemies. Be aware that these are the adversaries, waiting in ambush for everything you write. Memorize their characteristics, so you will recognize them anywhere:

—overlong sentences, general wordiness
—missed opportunities for brightness, humor, color or human touches
—missed opportunities for quotes
—premise unclear
—poorly organized, unfocused
—weak conclusion
—trumpets the obvious
—leaves questions unanswered
—needs examples or specifics
—meaningless statistics or details
—cluttered lead
—lead holds out a promise that isn't fulfilled
—vapid lead
—best lead is in a lower paragraph
—over- or under-attribution
—tasteless
—misuse of humor or irony
—handwringing, sentimentality
—lacking in fairness or balance
—too much negative wording
—confusing pronouns
—misspellings of words and names
—errors of fact
—style irregularities
—misuse or poor choice of words
—tense and number changes
—ragged punctuation (especially too many or too few commas)

Exciting Days in Shining Armor

Horace Greeley started it, with this one-liner: "Journalism will kill you, but it keeps you alive while you're at it."

Hal Boyle, the Associated Press columnist, much later added this two-liner: "What finer way for a man to wear out his life than in telling the exciting story of the most exciting century mankind has known? He will at least enter Valhalla with no rust on his armor."

—repetitions and redundancies
—cliches, stale expressions
—jargon, journalese, bureaucratese
—passive phrasings, wooden verbs
—too many modifiers
—mixing two or more unrelated thoughts in the same sentence
—the long warmup (extensive passages before the story gets to the point)
—weak linkages and transitions
—qualifying unqualifiable words ("completely eradicated," for example)
—subject not close to the verb
—mangled quotes, unnecessary quote marks
—one or more of the classic "Five Ws and an H" slighted
—the infamous dangling participles and misplaced modifiers

The following words should always raise a red flag. They are dangerous, because frequently they are used by writers who are guessing:

accident, mishap	flounder, founder
affect, effect	I, me, myself
among, between	imply, infer
anxious, eager	last, past
assure, ensure, insure	lay, lie
as, like	may, might
average, median, mean	more than, over
avert, avoid	partly, partially
capital, capitol	people, persons
compose, comprise	principle, principal
continual, continuous	prone, supine
convince, persuade	reluctant, reticent
dispute, refute	who, whom
farther, further	who, which
fewer, less	which, that

You might be tempted to cringe in the face of such burdens, and ask: "Do I really have to be that persnickety?"

They knew the answer to that question 2,500 years ago. Listen to Confucius:

"If language is incorrect, then what is said is not meant. If what is said is not meant, then what ought to be done remains undone."

Some Useful Formulas To Gauge Readability

Writing is a highly subjective experience, and resistant to formulas. But through the years, some serviceable guidelines have been developed. If you use them intelligently, they can help you achieve greater clarity and readability.

Such formulas take different paths, but most arrive at the same advice:

1. *Short is better than long.* Use mostly (but not all) short words, short sentences, short paragraphs (and, some would add, short stories).

2. *Simple forms are best.* Limit the use of words bearing prefixes and suffixes. Emphasize simple sentences, rather than compound or complex.

3. *Personal is better than impersonal.* Try to put people and names into your stories about issues and things. Use personal pronouns when you can do so without straining. Use quotes when they are relevant.

API has never developed a writing formula as such. It did, however, conduct a Reading Comprehension Survey, based on the study of 410 daily newspapers. The survey found strong correlation between words per sentence and reader comprehension. In most cases, the shorter the sentence the more easily it is understood. That fact bumps into another, however: A newspaper's main job is to provide information, and it's hard to pack much information into a short sentence. To get a good balance between readability and function, API suggested an average of 19 words per sentence.

Of the actual formulas, the one by Rudolf Flesch is probably the best known and most widely used.

Flesch developed the formula as his doctoral thesis, and then popularized it in his well-received book, "The Art of Plain Talk" (Harper, 1946). In a later book ("The Art of Readable Writing," Harper, 1949) he revised and expanded it.

The 1949 version is really two formulas. One is based on the number of words per sentence and the number of syllables per 100 words; it answers the question, "How easy?" The other is based on the number of "personal sentences" and "personal words," and answers the question, "How interesting?"

Flesch set as his standard "what the average American will read with ease and interest," and reserved his rating of "very poor" for what the average person "won't read if he can help it."

These are the numbers he attached to those ratings:

1. Words per average sentence. Standard is not more than 19 (Flesch prefers 17). Twenty to 23 is "fairly poor"; 24 to 27, "poor"; and above 27, "very poor."

2. The number of syllables per 100 words. Standard is not more than 150. From 151 to 162 is "fairly poor"; from 163 to 186, "poor"; and more than 186, "very poor."

3. The percentage of words that have personal interest (names, personal pronouns, the words "people" and "persons" and all words of specific masculine or feminine gender). Standard is at least six every 100 words. From three to five is "fairly poor"; one or two is "poor"; and zero is "very poor."

4. The percentage of sentences that have human interest (all sentences addressed to the reader, such as questions, commands and requests; plus all that are set in quotes). Standard is at least 12%. From 5 to 11 is "fairly poor"; one to four is "poor"; and zero is "very poor."

Flesch's work had a powerful impact. In the late 1940s he helped guide a successful effort by the Associated Press to simplify its writing. That, plus the cumulative effect of the books, has had a lasting result throughout the news media.

Others also have contributed formulas. Perhaps the best known is the "fog index" developed by Robert Gunning, who served as a consultant for United Press International and wrote the highly regarded book, "The Technique of Clear Writing" (McGraw-Hill, 1968).

It is based on these criteria:

1. Average number of words per sentence.

2. The percentage of words having three or more syllables.

3. The sum of the two figures above multiplied by 0.4.

The result is the number of years of schooling the reader needs to understand what you've written.

Gunning found that if you add 2½ words to the average sentence length, the readability level goes up one grade.

(Note: The first five and last five paragraphs of this chapter average 12.4

A Good Mix of What Matters Most

Try to make every story (1) informative; (2) interesting, and (3) useful.

Those characteristics don't have to be in perfect balance, but it helps to have a good mix.

Usefulness is increasingly important. Every person has problems, and you're a good friend if you offer answers.

Derick Daniels, who has edited both newspapers and magazines, offered this thought: "A good test of newspapers is to go through their pages looking for information that the reader can put to use in his own life within the next 24 hours."

words per sentence and 125 syllables per 100 words, and so qualify as "easy" reading on the Flesch scale. Under the Gunning formula, those same paragraphs test out at the 11th-grade level.)

To what level of reading ability do most newspaper writers aim their stories?

Don't ask. Very few writers or newspapers have set a definite figure as their norm. Most will tell you that they want to be readable to most of the public — that is, challenging enough to attract the college graduate without losing the grade-schooler. But they're not sure where that line should be drawn.

For those interested in the readability of individual words, "The Living Word Vocabulary" (Field Enterprises, 1976) could be helpful. Authors Edgar Dale and Joseph O'Rourke tested 43,000 words on children and adults from throughout the country. Their book lists these words, and tells how many readers at what grade level (4 through 16) know the meanings. (For example, at the tenth-grade level 69% know that "fetus" means an unborn child.)

Bell Laboratories has developed a way to score writing samples in a computer. Called Writer's Workbench, the program tests the samples against a dozen or more elements from recognized writing formulas (including Flesch).

William C. Porter, of the communications faculty at Brigham Young University, used the Bell program to test stories from eight newspapers, the Associated Press and United Press International. The average readership level for the group: Grade 11.19 (high-school junior).

In a later test, 69 stories from the Worcester (Mass.) Evening Gazette scored at the ninth-grade level. There was wide variation among departments, with sports at the sixth-grade level and local news at the 11th.

Formulas developed in education are similar to those developed in journalism. One of the foremost was devised by Dr. Edward Fry of the Rutgers University Reading Center. It has two components: Average sentence length and average number of syllables per 100 words. Those are plotted on a graph to indicate readability. For instance, a 17-word sentence length and 120 syllables indicate a sixth-grade reading level; figures of 17 and 150 fall into the ninth-grade level; and 17 and 180 are for college seniors (those long words cost you dearly.)

The computer is likely to become increasingly important in analyzing writing and gauging readability. Insurance companies are using it to help simplify their policies. Lawyers are exploring, electronically, ways to demystify legal language. General Motors rewrote its owner manuals after running them through a computer and finding them too dense. The Booth Newspapers of Michigan picked up and modified the GM program, and are using it to simplify their own copy.

A warning is in order, however. The formulas and the computers will never, in and of themselves, make you a fine writer. They are only helps and tools. Good writing, in the end, still depends on you.

Explaining Difficult Subjects

Complex situations are the true test of a writer.

What are the relationships between two elements, or four, or fourteen? How do they compare in size or importance? How do they affect each other?

If you don't know, how will the reader ever know? And even if you do know, the reader can't benefit unless you explain it all clearly.

Some writers seem born with a superior sense of comparatives and relationships. But most of us have to work at it, and it's very hard work. Mastery comes mainly through three channels:

1. *Knowledge and awareness.* Those develop largely from relentless reading and listening, and will help you to comprehend complex situations more precisely.

2. *Practice.* Describe your mother well enough that a stranger could spot her arriving at the airport. When you see a map marking the site of a plane crash, try to write that same information into a paragraph. If a complicated series of events occurred, try to boil it down to a single comprehensible statement.

3. *Relating the unknown to the known.* If your subject is strange and mysterious, put it into terms or examples that are familiar to the reader. The newsmagazines do a good job of that. Newsweek, for example, had this to say about how acute leukemia develops, and what is being done about it:

> The invasion begins: deep in the bone marrow, a ragged-edged cell divides. Four days later the pair becomes four. The arithmetic is simple, the results devastating. Doubling again and again, the abnormal white blood cells leach through the marrow, pour into the bloodstream and then spread to other tissues. There, in a kind of pathological Gresham's law, they crowd out normal white and red cells. They consume nutrients and oxygen, sap the body's strength and make their victim increasingly vulnerable to infection. Acute leukemia has now taken hold.
>
> The counterattack is chemical warfare. Shot into the victim's bloodstream, an array of complex molecules takes on the malignant cells, each chemical fighting a specialized part of the battle. Vincristine interrupts the growth process and paralyzes some of the cells in mid-division. A drug called 6-MP sneaks inside other cells, stopping them from making the DNA they need to reproduce. Methotrexate acts like a Trojan horse: shaped like a vitamin that the voracious cancer cell needs, it is quickly gobbled up. But once inside, the molecule proves as indigestible as a pebble and the cell chokes and dies. Under the chemical onslaught, the tumor cells falter, stop and then retreat, leaving millions of their dead behind.

Newspaper writers should not, of course, forfeit that type of explaining to any other medium.

If it isn't one of your strong points, resolve to do whatever is necessary to make it so.

A Letter to an Intelligent Friend

Charles McDowell, Washington correspondent of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, has guided and inspired hundreds of writers at API and elsewhere. His primary suggestions are:

A. *Write* the story as you would *tell* the story. Where circumstances permit, break away from the "inverted pyramid" approach and let the story run a more natural course.

B. Write your story as though you were writing a letter to an intelligent friend. Avoid indirection. Use detail, and set the scene. After your story is under way, tell the events chronologically. Don't be afraid of idiom; it is at the heart of the American language.

C. Do be personal. Once in a while, dare to use the first person. But never overwhelm with your own personality; never strain, and avoid condescension at all costs.

Spelling Is an Acquired Art

Editors who do the hiring hear these words often from newsroom job candidates: "I know I'm not a very good speller, but I always keep a dictionary close at hand."

Those editors know better. If the applicants used the dictionary a lot, they would probably be superior spellers.

Few errors are more visible, and more demeaning to a writer, than misspelled words.

If our schools don't develop the ability, then the writer must do it himself — and the only known way is through determination, practice and continual checking.

It means *really* keeping a dictionary at hand — and using it a dozen, two dozen times a day to look up difficult words. Over the course of time, the correct forms will stick in your memory.

For handy reference or study, here are 150 words that are troublesome:

abscess
accelerator
accolade
accommodate
adherent
adieu
allotted
anoint
antediluvian
apocalypse
arithmetic
attorneys
barbiturate
battalion
benefited
biscuit
bouillon
bourgeois
boutonniere
braggadocio
buoyancy
caffeine
calendar
carburetor
cemetery
chauffeur
cirrhosis
commitment
competent
compatible
confectionery
connoisseur
consensus
crystallize
curiosity
curious
deductible
delicatessen

D. Relax. Writing is hard work, but it doesn't have to be frantic.

E. Simplify. The simplest means of expression is the declarative sentence. Make your sentences straight and direct (but not all of them, and not too many in a row, or you become monotonous).

F. If you would astonish the world, try *under*statement.

Great writers, McDowell says, share these traits:

1. They are great readers. They start at an early age, and never stop.
2. They are often great movie-goers. They love the story-telling, the cuts and transitions.
3. They are open to new things, and new ways of looking at old things.
4. They hook events to people, and tell what they will mean to people.
5. They develop a strong sense of rhythm, of scene, of unity, of pace, of ear.
6. They are not afraid to be literate. They have faith in the reader.

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desiccate
deterrent
dilemma
dilettante
diphtheria
disappoint
drunkenness
dysentery
ecstasy
eleemosynary
embarrass
excel
exhilarated
existence
fluorescent
gauge
genealogy
guillotine
guttural
harass
heinous
hemorrhage
hygiene
hypocrisy
hypothesis
impostor
impresario
indispensable
infallible
infrared
innocuous
innuendo
inoculate
iridescent
irresistible
jodhpurs
judgment
kaleidoscope
ketchup
knowledge
lavender
liaison
lien
liquefy
maintenance
mantelpiece
mayonnaise
memento
mileage
millennium
miscellaneous
missile
moccasin
nickel
nutrient
obeisance
obstreperous
occasion
occurrence
odyssey
opossum
paraffin
parallel
paraphernalia
pavilion
perseverence
piccolo
picknicking
prerogative
prevaricate
privilege
proceed
propeller
pyorrhea
questionnaire
rarefy
raspberry
reconnaissance
reminiscence
restaurateur
resuscitate
reveille
rhinoceros
rhythm
sacrilegious
sapphire
sarsaparilla
scurrilous
separate
sergeant
shepherd
silhouette
stupefy
superfluous
superintendent
supersede
susceptible
symmetrical
synonymous
titillate
tonsillitis
ukulele
usage
vacillation
vacuum
vermilion
vestibule
vicissitude
vilify
viscount
weird
zeppelin

Learn to Analyze What You Read

You'll hear it often: To be a good writer, first be a good reader.

But one doesn't automatically follow the other, so a homely footnote should be added to the advice. It is this:

When you read something you especially like, or dislike, analyze it and learn from it.

Look at it statistically: How does it rate on length of words and sentences? What is the proportion of adjectives and adverbs? How many personal pronouns? On how many words are you in doubt about the writer's meaning?

Examine it structurally: Does each sentence or section have a sensible relationship to the one that precedes it, and the one that follows? Is there variety and cadence in the types of sentences? Does each word, and each sentence, carry its share of the weight in telling the story?

Gauge the literary quality: Does this passage flow easily into the mind, and leave a sense of clarity and luster? What elements seem to have been most important in that result?

And finally, assess the vitality: Are the verbs precise and vivid? Are there figures of speech? Does it have a human quotient? Will anyone feel anything from this passage, or will anyone care?

For practice, analyze two lead paragraphs from The Washington Post. The first was written by staff writer Denis Collins, and was drawn from testimony in a murder trial:

> "She was in bed with her lover. Her husband was standing in the doorway with a gun. The barrel seemed to be aiming at a spot just between her eyes."

The other concerns a development in the federal government:

> "The Interior Department, seeking to curb environmental damage in the nation's coal fields, yesterday proposed new mining regulations designed to halt allegedly widespread misuse of a controversial exemption in a landmark mine reclamation law."

Now analyze this sample — the ending on Mike Royko's last column for the Chicago Daily News, on the day it died:

> "When I was a kid, the worst of all days was the last day of summer vacation, and we were in the schoolyard playing softball, and the sun was down and it was getting dark. But I didn't want it to get dark. I didn't want the game to end. It was too good, too much fun. I wanted it to stay light forever, so we could keep playing forever, so the game would go on and on.
>
> "That's how I feel now. C'mon, c'mon. Let's play one more inning. One more time at bat. One more pitch. Just one? Stick around, guys. We can't break up this team. It's too much fun.
>
> "But the sun always went down. And now it's almost dark again."

Not every story has that kind of potential. But then, few writers make such

profound use of the potential that is offered them.

Here are two passages from a classic — Kirke Simpson's story for the Associated Press on the burial of the first Unknown Soldier in November 1921:

> "To General Jacques of Belgium it remained to add his own touch to these honors. He tore from the breast of his own tunic the medal of valor pinned there by the Belgian King, tore it with a sweeping gesture, and tenderly bestowed it on the unknown American warrior."

> "High and clear and true in the echoes of the guns, a bugle lifted the old, old notes of taps, the lullaby for the living soldier, in death his requiem . . . . The guns roared out again in the national salute. He was home, The Unknown, to sleep forever among his own."

Simpson matched the specialness of the event with the elegance of his writing. Of those two elements are classics made.

If It's Mush, It's Indigestible

Buzz words are like a snake's rattle. They drive people away.

Mushy wordings and phrases rarely lead to understanding. They're more likely to put the reader to sleep.

Gobbledygook has a bad name in the newspaper trade. But all too often writers take the easy way out; they don't bother to translate what the source said, and let the readers try to sort out the meaning for themselves.

As a reminder to guide your own writing, you might paste up this "Buzz Phrase Generator." There is uncertainty about its origin, but not about its message.

The BPG consists of three columns of buzz words numbered zero to nine:

Column 1	*Column 2*	*Column 3*
0. integrated	0. management	0. options
1. total	1. organizational	1. flexibility
2. systematized	2. monitored	2. capability
3. parallel	3. reciprocal	3. mobility
4. functional	4. digital	4. programming
5. responsive	5. logistical	5. concept
6. optimal	6. transitional	6. time-phase
7. synchronized	7. incremental	7. projection
8. compatible	8. third-generation	8. hardware
9. balanced	9. policy	9. contingency

The procedure is simple. Think of any three-digit number at random — for example, 257. Then select the corresponding buzz word from each column: 2 from the first, 5 from the second, 7 from the third. You now have "systematized logistical projection." You may not know what it means, but neither will the person you are trying to impress.

When the Words Won't Come

"Writer's block" is synonymous with sweaty palms and a blank mind. Author Robert Benchley is reported to have sat at his typewriter for an hour after typing the word "The." Finally he finished the sentence — "hell with it" — and went out for a drink.

The following thoughts on how to conquer the affliction were offered during an API Seminar by Donald M. Murray, Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial writer, English professor at the University of New Hampshire, writing coach and author of a dozen books including "Writing for Your Readers" (Globe Pequot Press).

—*Writer's block is a disease of affluence.* It never occurs in a person writing a hard news story on deadline, and rarely in an unpublished or unsuccessful writer.

—*Write early.* On a long project, write those parts of the story early which can be written early. Writing reveals its own needs. When you write early, the final draft is a fitting together of completed parts, a much less intimidating job than an entire first draft.

—*Small deadlines.* If you contemplate the entire project, it may seem impossible. So break it into pieces, and write a page or a section or an incident at a time.

—*Don't write the lead first.* When you become paralyzed searching for the perfect lead, plunge in and do the rest of the story first and the lead afterward. Many writers have made believe they were writing a letter to an editor or a friend, and were able to produce a draft that way.

—*Write the end first.* When you don't know how to start a piece, it may be helpful to write the end first. Once you know where you are going, you may see how to get there.

—*Quit.* Walk away from the desk, read, get another coffee, do something else for a few minutes and then make another run at it.

—*Ask the reader's questions.* When you have an enormous amount of material on a subject, try writing down the questions the reader will ask of the story. These are often the most obvious questions, the ones you lose track of as you do your research. Once you list those questions, in the order the reader will ask them, you have your article.

—*Use different tools.* When stuck on the typewriter or terminal, turn and write the next paragraphs by hand. Or try dictating. The change of technique can release the flow.

—*Try a different writing time.* If you come up dry in the morning, try the afternoon.

—*Finding the problem.* What is the central problem or theme to be dealt with in your story? Once you have defined it in writing, the solution follows.

—*Lower your standards, temporarily.* Bring them down, as writer William Stafford suggests, until they no longer inhibit you. Get something down on paper, or on your terminal screen, even though it doesn't satisfy you. You can rewrite, polish and upgrade later.

—*Don't look back.* Once a draft is started, try to keep it going until the end. If you can't, it's helpful to practice the trick used by Hemingway and many other novelists: Always stop in the middle of a sentence. Then, when you return to your desk, you can finish that sentence right away and be in the middle of the writing act again.

Concentrate on General English

Four principal varieties of English usage are categorized in "The Perrin-Smith Handbook of Current English." They are:

1. **General.** This is the broad pattern for general conversation, for newspaper and magazine writing, literature, advertising and most business correspondence.

2. **Formal.** This is starchy stuff, showing up most often in academic writing, professional reports, essays and scripted lectures, governmental documents, and the sterner aspects of business correspondence. On the whole, it should not be used in newspaper writing. When it occurs in source material, it should be rewritten into General English.

3. **Informal.** This usually appears in conversation, but also shows up in the breezier areas of newspaper writing and personal correspondence. It includes shoptalk, slang and some localisms.

4. **Nonstandard.** This is usually heavily laced with regional or local variants. Perrin-Smith describes it as "language not much affected by school instruction . . . not appropriate for public affairs." Obviously, Nonstandard has limited usefulness for a newspaper writer.

Know those four types. Use General as the mainstay of your writing. Use the others only for special effects — seldom, and carefully.

The Coach Enters the Picture

At first, the concept of writing coaches was mind-boggling in most newsrooms. The main question was: Why would professional writers need anyone to tell them how to write?

That, of course, was the wrong question. The value of a writing coach is not in teaching people how to write; it's in showing them how to write better.

Roy Peter Clark was the first writing coach to reach into the consciousness of writers everywhere. He was teaching English in college when the St. Petersburg Times asked him in 1977 to start working with its reporters. The program there was watched closely by other newspapers and led many of them to follow suit.

Putting words on paper is like athletics, entertainment, scholarship or any other endeavor calling for excellence. You can learn a lot in schooling, or classes, or on your own. But for the ultimate polish, most people benefit from personalized guidance and instruction.

At most newspapers, that special instruction has traditionally come from the editors. But most editors have a lot of other things to do — and sometimes the instructing gets lost in the busyness.

An increasing number of papers have met that problem by appointing coaches. Sometimes it's someone already on the staff, but often it's an outsider (such as a professor or a noted writer) who takes on the task on a term or part-time basis.

The coach usually is not a member of top newsroom management, and has no authority to tell reporters how to write their stories.

Coaches usually do part of their work with everyone in mind — writing

How to Stop a Runaway Sentence

If you aren't satisfied with your writing and would like a quick fix, try this one:

Use 25 percent more periods, and correspondingly fewer commas and semicolons.

Sentences have something in common with a golfer's drives: The longer they are, the greater the chance they will end up in the rough.

The sensible solution for most writing: Remember Western Union.

In another day, telegrams said "STOP" after each brief sentence. As your own sentences edge past 20 words, start thinking "STOP."

Period.

guidelines, tip sheets, and general critiques, or scheduling mini-seminars. But the heart of their work is one-on-one, with writers at all levels of proficiency.

Many newspapers leave it to the writers themselves to come forward and ask for the coach's help — and most usually do. Some papers, however, "volunteer" weaker writers who are reluctant.

The primary method in individual cases is the critique. The coach goes over the writer's work to point out flaws, gaps and errors, and to suggest better approaches and techniques. Very importantly, the coach positions himself as a friend of the writer, not as a representative of the management.

Newspapers that have used coaches seem to agree that *(a)* there are discernible benefits; *(b)* surprisingly, the better writers seem to get more benefit than the poorer ones; and *(c)* the new levels of proficiency are not permanent; there is slippage as the months go by, so periodic attention is needed.

Never Fail to Edit or Rewrite

You tap out the last sentence of your story, lean back and heave a sigh. It is written.

But whoa there, just a minute. You're not finished yet, any more than a painter is finished when he dollops paint onto the house from the bucket.

The painter has to even out the coating and smooth out the brush marks with a few finishing strokes. And the writer has to add a few last strokes too, for much the same purpose.

Only a tiny handful of reporters can pass along their copy as first written. The rest of us have to clean it up and give it luster the hard way, through second (or third) effort.

At the very least, give your copy one complete rereading. Try to approach the story as though you have never seen it before, and know nothing about the subject. That way, tangled wordings or unanswered questions will become obvious to you. Smooth the rough spots as you go or, preferably, make notations and come back later.

If there are lots of rough spots, or you are unhappy with the story's organization or flow, take the trouble to rewrite. It's a bother — but you're the professional, paid to make the story understandable. It's unthinkable that you pass that chore along to the reader, and make him pay for the privilege.

Associate Editor Clarke Stallworth of the Birmingham News, a frequent API Discussion Leader, advises this procedure to review a story once it is written:

> —What does this story mean to the reader? A $5 million gas-company refund? Or $35 for each customer? Tell it in the reader's terms.
>
> —Is your story easy to read? Do the eyes glide right through it without stopping? Is the reader likely to understand it first time through?

—Is the story entertaining? Will the reader have fun reading it?

—Does your story have an interesting beginning? If it's routine, how can you improve it?

—Have you used fairly short words, sentences and paragraphs? Will the reader run out of mental breath reading you?

—Do you give the reader too many thoughts in a sentence? Would shorter sentences help?

—Is your story written to *express* something, or to *impress* somebody? If you're trying to impress, change it.

—Do you tell a story? Does it move along well? Will the reader want to know what's coming next?

—Do you use lively, picture verbs? Underline all the verbs on a page. If they aren't lively, change them.

—Do you write in the active voice? The pitcher *throws* the ball. The ball is *thrown* by the pitcher. One active, one passive. You know which is better.

—Is the story well organized? Does each paragraph hook onto the next one?

Follow Style to Ease the Reader's Way

A writer doesn't have to follow fashions, but does have to follow style.

What words are capitalized? How are they abbreviated? What rules guide word usage? When are occupational and courtesy titles used?

You need logical, consistent answers for those questions, and others like them, to avoid confusion and to ease the reader's way.

Most writers turn to two primary sources for guidance:

1. *A style book.* Most newspapers rely mainly on the book compiled jointly by the Associated Press and United Press International, and available from either. A few newspapers, and most publishing houses, have compiled their own books. (Prof. John Hohenberg's book, "The Professional Journalist," includes a model style book as an appendix.)

2. *A good dictionary.* AP and UPI use Webster's New World Dictionary as their primary reference source, with Webster's Third International as backup. But there are other fine books as well. Using one is more important than which one.

—Is the story full of jargon? Have you written "fractured metatarsal" instead of "broken foot," or "stay the writ," rather than "delay the order?"

—Do you make pictures for the reader? Can he *see* your people, and the place?

—Are you showing, or telling? The man was nervous? Or, the man's fingers shook as he lit a cigar. Don't tell me, *show* me.

—Are you precise? Do you write "playground equipment" or "swings, merry-go-rounds and seesaws?"

—Does your story have unnecessary words? Ask yourself before you write: What am I trying to say? What is this story all about? Later, go through your copy and take out every word that doesn't help tell the story.

—Are you busy as a bee, writing cliches?

—Is your story about a person, or a thing? Readers identify with a person.

—Do you involve the reader's senses?

If you have the right answers for those questions, the reader will like your story. But don't assume you have the right answers. As a final check, remember this counsel from master writer E.B. White: "When you say something, make sure you have said it. The chances of your having said it are only fair."

Verbs Has to Agree With Their Subjects

Noted editor Harold Evans, in his book "Newsman's English," credits this bit of reverse advice to Helen Ferril of the Rocky Mountain News. Others believe it orginated elsewhere. In any case, it's clever counsel:

1. Don't use no double negative.
2. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
3. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
4. About them sentence fragments.
5. When dangling, watch your participles.
6. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
7. Just between you and I, case is important too.
8. Don't write run-on sentences they are hard to read.
9. Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
10. Try to not ever split infinitives.
11. It's important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
12. Proofread your writing to see if you any words out.
13. Correct spelling is esential.

Good Books for a Short Shelf

There are dozens of worthwhile books on writing and editing, and everyone in the news field should dip in frequently to keep perspectives sharp.

You should, of course, have ready access to a good dictionary and thesaurus. There should also be at hand such volumes as Henry W. Fowler's "Dictionary of Modern English Usage"; Roy H. Copperud's "Dictionary of Usage and Style"' "The Elements of Style," by Strunk and White, and perhaps Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations."

After that there is plenty of argument on the best writing/editing guides, but you won't go far wrong with this list of 20:

"On Writing Well," by William Zinsser. (Harper & Row, New York, 1979)

"Newsman's English: A Guide to Writing Lively, Lucid and Effective Prose," by Harold Evans. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1972)

The Honest Truth About Redundancies

This is the Minnesota Newspaper Association list of frequently seen or heard redundancies:

absolutely necessary
advance planning
ask the question
assemble together
at a later day
attached hereto
at the present time
canceled out
city of Chicago
close proximity
consensus of opinion
carbon copy
continue on
each and every
enclosed you will find
fall down
first and foremost
friend of mine
gathered together
honest truth
important essentials
necessary requirements
open up
other alternative
patently obvious
plain and simple
postpone until later
reasonable and fair
redo again
refer back
right and proper
rise up
rules and regulations
send in
small in size
still remain
temporarily suspended
totally unnecessary
true facts
various and sundry

"Grammar for Journalists," by E.L. Callihan. (Revised edition, Chilton, Radnor, Pa., 1969)

"Questions You Always Wanted to Ask About English, But Were Afraid to Raise Your Hand," by Maxwell Nurnberg. (Washington Square Press, New York, 1972)

"The Most Common Mistakes in English Usage," by Thomas Elliott Berry. (Chilton, Philadelphia, 1961)

"The Word, An Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing," by Rene J. Cappon. (The Associated Press, New York, 1982)

"Improving Newswriting, the Best of the Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors," edited by Loren Ghiglione. (ASNE Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1982)

"The Mass Media: Reporting, Writing, Editing," by William L. Rivers. (Second edition, Harper & Row, New York, 1975)

"The Professional Journalist," by John Hohenberg. (Third edition, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1973)

"News Writing," by George A. Hough III. (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1975)

"News Reporting and Writing," by Melvin Mencher. (William C. Brown, Dubuque, 1977)

"The Careful Writer," by Theodore M. Bernstein. (Atheneum Press, New York, 1977)

"The Art of Readable Writing," by Rudolf Flesch. (25th anniversary edition, Harper & Row, New York, 1974)

"The Technique of Clear Writing," by Robert Gunning. (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1968)

"The American Language," by H.L. Mecken. (An abridgement published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1964)

"Feature Writing for Newspapers," by Daniel R. Williamson. (Hastings, New York, 1975)

"The Opinion Function: Editorial and Interpretive Reporting for the News Media," by John L. Hulteng. (Harper & Row, New York, 1973)

"Editorial and Persuasive Writing: Opinion Functions of the News Media," by Harry W. Stonecipher. (Communication Arts Books, Hastings House, New York, 1979)

"The Art of Editing," by Floyd K. Baskette and Jack Z. Sissors. (Macmillan, New York, 1971)

"The Solid Gold Copy Editor," by Carl Riblet, Jr. (Aldine Publishing, Chicago, 1974)

Perspective on Good Writing

For thoughts on writing, go to writers. Here is a selection from the past 2200 years:

Cato the Elder, Roman stateman: "Seize the subject and the words will follow."

Epictetus, Greek philosopher ("Discourses II"): "If you wish to be a writer, write."

Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism": "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, as those move easiest who have learned to dance."

Ernest Hemingway: "Easy writing makes hard reading."

Georgia O'Keeffe, American muralist: "Writing takes more than talent. It takes a kind of nerve . . . and a lot of hard, hard work."

From the Arabic (al Tawhidi): "Writing is jewelry fashioned by the hand from the pure gold of the intellect."

Professor William Strunk, Jr., in his invaluable booklet, "The Elements of Style": "Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

Robert Southey, English poet: "If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams — the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn."

Stanley Walker, famed city editor of the old New York Herald Tribune: "He (the person fresh to journalism) must learn, if he doesn't already know it, to avoid adjectives and to swear by the little verbs that bounce and leap and swim and cut."

James Marlow, Associated Press writer: "People in the news too often are like spirit people: Without faces, bodies, clothes, or any identifying mark. They're merely names attached to voice boxes. Statements come out of the boxes. You know by the name which box is talking."

Winston Churchill: "Short words are best, and the old words when short are best of all."

Editing

The Editor's Tasks: Tighten and Polish

Words are like leaves, and where they most abound
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

—Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism"

You should frame that gem — or at least hang it in a prominent place in your head.

It emphasizes the first rule of copy editing: TIGHTEN.

Good editing is like population control, without the controversy. This sort of pruning will get you nothing but praise.

Any word that is loafing, or standing in the way, should be treated mercilessly. Think in terms of shorter stories, shorter paragraphs, shorter sentences, shorter phrases, shorter words — but without any loss of worthy information.

When copy editors master that task, however, they aren't finished. Other problems await their attention. Phil Currie, vice president/news at Gannett Co., Inc., examined a mound of newspapers and compiled this list of major editing flaws (yes, they began with the writer — but the editor is the gatekeeper, and should never have let them through):

—dull, wooden phrasings.

—poor grammar, spelling and punctuation.

—problems of story organization.

—errors of fact or interpretation.

—holes in stories.

—too much clutter.

—redundancy.

If the copy editor sharpens his lance and slays those dragons, he should ask for a raise — and get it. He has become what Carl Riblet used as the title of a book: "The Solid Gold Copy Editor."

API seminars, and the newspaper world at large, have had the benefit of some fine copy-editing teachers. Below you will find high points of their advice:

Paul Swensson, while a member of the API staff, wrote that "writers often resent editors, perhaps like a tree or shrub resents the pruning knife." Perfection in editing, he added, "is climaxed by the safe delivery of the writer's message to the reader's mind."

As succinct advice to editors, he offered this:

"At the start of the editing job, read the story whole. Sit on your hands, if necessary, to keep them away from the copy.

"Examine the lead clinically. Will it grab the reader? Does it have one (the right one)? Is it stated simply, as in story telling? Is it written actively?

"Is the rest of the story likely to keep the reader reading? Does it give him clues as to what to expect next? Is it simple, and complete? Does the writing flow easily? Does it talk to the reader until the very last word? Does it end with a bang or a pianissimo?"

Kenn Finkel of the Dallas Times Herald, a frequent API Discussion Leader on the subject of editing:

"The editor is the conscience of the writer and the newspaper. He challenges facts and writing, and upholds the newspaper's standards. It is his duty to help every story he edits.

A Three-in-One Role for the Editor

What does the editor of a newspaper do?

The chief editor — by whatever title — has this agenda:

1. Developing the philosophy and character of news/editorial content, and guiding its outreach in the community.

2. Overseeing the management of the newsroom.

3. Directing and taking part in the work of the newsroom (gathering and selecting, writing, editing, presentation).

For best results, those three roles should be integrated and balanced. None can be slighted without injury.

"He operates with a scalpel, not a cleaver. He taps with a jeweler's tool, not a sledgehammer.

"The editor should read a story completely before making changes. It is important to understand what the writer is trying to say.

"Then the editor can remove words, tighten construction, smooth sentence flow and do other things that make the story more pleasing.

"The editor should also make sure that all questions are answered. If the editor has questions, the reader will, too. The editor can attempt to find answers and work them into the story. Or he can ask the writer (the wire service if it's wire copy) to get the answers.

"The editor must also be satisfied that the story is fair, that both sides of an issue are presented, that the accused gets a chance to reply, that topics mentioned in abstract are brought to specifics.

"Having read the story once, then editing sentence by sentence, the editor should — time permitting — read the story a third time as a final assurance of its soundness and worth."

Eugene R. Miller, editor and publisher of the Evening Sentinel at Ansonia, Connecticut:

I. The first task in editing a story is to see that it is arranged correctly — that it is architecturally sound. There are four steps:

1. Read the copy quickly but carefully all the way through to find out what the story says. If you do not fully understand it, read it again. If necessary, question the reporter.

2. Decide what the most important point is. If the reporter failed to put it in the lead, you must do so. (This applies, with few exceptions, to straight-news stories but less often to feature stories.)

3. Then see that the rest of the story is properly arranged.

4. Decide what parts of the story can be omitted if necessary, and mark them in the margin. Leave the actual cutting until last, when you are sure you know whether and what you want to cut.

II. The second task is to polish the lead, if it needs polishing.

1. See that it is as short as possible — no longer than three typewritten lines, ordinarily. But don't make it extremely short; the reader deserves an informative lead.

2. See that it is as bold and forceful as the contents of the story will justify. A short declarative sentence usually makes the strongest lead. Tell what happened.

3. Limit it to one idea, almost always.

III. The third task is to go through the rest of the story with care.

1. Be accurate, above all. Be skeptical of every "fact" in every story.
   a. Know which reporters are reliable and which are careless.
   b. Weigh the probability of every statement. Is it in character? Is it likely to be true?
   c. Do the arithmetic. If a column of figures is said to amount to so much, add it. If X is said to be a certain percentage of Y, do the long division.
   d. Make sure of names, dates, times, places, middle initials, history, political affiliations, sums of money, criminal charges, titles, addresses.

The Stories That Arrive on Cat's Feet

Even bright minds are dulled by routine, and therein lies a significant hazard for newspaper writers and editors.

Malcolm F. Mallette of the API staff wrote this about story ideas:

"I am struck by the wide fluctuation in the quality of news content of many newspapers. When big stories are breaking, there is no problem. But when breaking news is slow, readers often receive small return for their time and money. Behind the uneven content in newspapers, I perceive editorial tunnel vision, with reporters plodding the hard-packed trail from city hall to courthouse to police station, virtually blind to much that is happening about them. Other newspapers seem always to offer a reading bonus, even on the slowest days for breaking news. The difference is staff-generated ideas."

Some stories assign themselves. A plane crashes, or the governor is re-elected, and a story is certain to follow.

But much of what happens in life is not connected to a dramatic event. In every community, many major developments arrive on cat's feet.

That type of story isn't self-assigning. It has to be conceived by journalists who, individually or collectively, turn the world over in their minds every day in an eternal quest to see it in new ways.

The writer and the editor have to be equally involved in that quest. As Spokane city editor Robert L. Rose said during an API session: "If you can't come up with good, meaty assignments, don't expect good, meaty writing."

2. Be clear. Lack of clarity is the most common failing of news stories.

a. Make it simple, even if it's a complex subject. Convert complicated and difficult sentences into simple ones.

b. Make it complete. Give enough background so the story is understandable, but not so much that reading is impeded.

c. Make sure transitions are clear; avoid abrupt jumps in thought.

d. Explain, explain. Never let a word, an expression or a sentence get by if you think the reader might not know what it means.

3. Be brief. In particular, cut hard on "essential" but dull stories. By cutting every superfluous word, sentence and paragraph you will be making room in your newspaper for more interesting stories.

4. Be grammatical. Avoid slang, fad expressions, cliches.

5. Follow style — whatever your newspaper's style may be. If it has none, establish one.

6. Watch closely for libel. The loaded story or headline is almost always the one to which no one gave a second thought. So give a second thought.

7. Beware radical surgery. Try to preserve the spirit and flavor of the original — even when you yourself would have written the story differently.

Charles A. King, Ottaway Newspapers executive, wrote:

"Your newspaper is no stronger than its copy desk. It should be staffed by the best-informed generalists you can get. You need people who read, read, read. People who know your area. People with a wide range of interests. When you find them, pay them well enough to keep them.

"On every story they should ask and answer four main questions: Is it complete? Is it accurate? Is it clear and well organized? Does it have an effective one-two punch at the top — a good headline and a good lead?"

Jerry Bellune, educator and consultant:

1. Pull secondary information out of the lead and put it in subsequent paragraphs. Do the same with ponderous attribution.

2. You are the writer's friend. If the writer has a style, respect and preserve it.

3. Beware of numbers in text. Too many boggle the mind. Break them out into a chart.

4. Avoid excessive attribution. But make sure that controversial or disputed information is clearly attributed.

5. Beware numbing quotes.

6. Send the story back to the writer if you don't understand it. If you don't, the reader won't either.

Headline Techniques

J. Montgomery Curtis, longtime executive director of API, had an easily remembered rule for headline writers:

"Write every one so you could push open the swinging doors, shout the head into a crowded bar, and everyone inside would know what it means."

Monty had a little tongue in his cheek, of course, but there are lots of rules worse than that one. Go through today's newspaper, mentally shouting headlines into the bar; how many will cut through the haze, and how many will create more of it?

A headline has to be clear, purposeful and compelling. Those are the main criteria for an advertisement, and that is exactly what a headline is.

Readers shop their way through the daily paper, looking for things that will be informative, interesting or useful. They'll read the things that touch them, and pass over those that don't. The headline is the quick indicator.

So make it a good ad, but also make it accurate and honest. Every reader's suspicion snaps on when he picks up a newspaper; he'll spot a misleading headline, and regard it as a betrayal.

From the API files and elsewhere, here is advice for headline writers:

Eugene R. Miller, editor and publisher of the Ansonia (Conn.) Sentinel:

1. In a straight-news headline, summarize the story accurately. Here are steps to take:

1. Read the story carefully all the way through.

2. Decide what the point of the story is. It is usually, but not always, in the lead. The point is almost always something that has just happened or is expected to happen.

3. Fashion the headline to state the point of the story. Far too many heads are written beside the point; for example:

Mayor Describes
His Finances

It improves if written directly on the point:

'I Never Stole,'
Mayor Tells Jury

4. Pack in as much information as possible. The partly empty head is one of the most common headline faults. Use most of the space available (but leave a cushion of white). Be specific and unambiguous. Make every word work; never give one a free ride (for example, tighten "Fined in Court" to "Fined"). If there is more than one preposition in a headline, rewrite it.

5. Write most heads in the active voice — the same as you would the story.

6. In a multi-column, multi-line head, try to convey a complete thought or phrase in the top line. Failing that, try to put the active verb in the top line. Failing that, try to get a key word in the top line.

7. Use names. They still make news — and good headlines. But be sure your readers will recognize the names.

8. Search for the felicitous phrase, the apt expression. Give a headline grace and sparkle whenever that is proper and unforced.

9. Try to write heads that convey tone as well as information. If the story is dramatic, funny, sad or matter-of-fact, the head should be, too.

10. Use good taste. If in doubt, change the wording. Watch every headline for possible double meanings or smutty connotations.

11. Put a second-day head on a second-day story. On the day after, the point is no longer that the plane crashed, but that nine survivors have been found; no longer that the Red Sox won, but that the coach thinks he has found a winning combination.

12. Use a type face and size that will help to tell the nature and importance of the story.

II. Avoid these things in straight-news headlines:

1. "Carpenter" heads, patched together of words and phrases stolen from the lead.

2. Headlinese — terms that resemble English but are seldom found except in newspaper headlines: set, flay, confab, slate, hit, rip, nab, probe, huddle, eye.

3. Verb heads: "Arrest Burglars" or "Burn City Hall." Studies have shown that headlines beginning with a verb repel readers rather than attract them.

4. Negative heads, usually.

5. Strings of adjectives. They are hard to read.

6. Runarounds or split heads; this one is a classic:

Soviet Virgin
Lands Short of
Goal Again

7. Question heads, usually. Readers want information, not questions.

8. Heavy punctuation. Rewrite to thin it out.

9. Heads based on facts far down in the story. If the facts are that important, move them higher.

10. Facts or interpretations in the headline that are not in the story.

11. An unqualified head if the story is hedged or qualified.

12. Editorializing or insinuation.

13. Revealing the point of a suspended-interest story.

14. Quotes that don't accurately reflect the story.

III. Some special points for feature headlines:

1. Pique the reader's interest; do not merely summarize the story. Convey a flavor, produce an impression, project a mood.

2. Strive for smoothness and easy flow. Avoid forcing or strain.

3. Be evocative. The feature head often uses allusion rather than bald statement (but remember that it still has to suggest the story).

4. It is more difficult to headline a feature than a straight-news story. Set aside more time for the copy editor, just as for the writer.

Prof. John Bremner, of the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas:

1. Tell readers what the story is about; don't try to drag them into it with a vague or tricky headline.

2. Use the bikini head to cover the main points; avoid the crinoline head, which tries to cover everything but says very little.

Bad Headlines Good Only for Laughs

The headlines below were actually published, proving that editors shouldn't work while they are sleeping.

New Maternity Clothes Flatter
Big Rise Seen in Teen Mothers
Suicide Victim Listed as Satisfactory
Owner of Andretti's Car Fumes at USAC
Officers Finally Get Shot at Promotion Exams
Jury Is Still Out on Composting Toilets
Dry Wood Best for Burning
U.S. a 'Reliable' Supplier of Nuclear Nohow
Homosexual Loses Boy Scout Suit

Headline writers, like reporters, must take a careful, detached look before they let go of their work. Is it in good taste? Can it be read more than one way? Could it be viewed as ungrammatical, banal or stupid?

3. Avoid makeshift gimmicks for attribution.

4. Don't point up the cuties. If you have a pun headline, for example, don't emphasize it with quotation marks.

5. Avoid undue familiarity. (Don't use Kissie for Kissinger, etc.)

6. Have a subject.

7. Have a verb (a strong one whenever possible).

8. Get the tense right.

9. Avoid padding.

10. Avoid obscure abbreviations.

11. Avoid unfortunate juxtaposition with pictures.

David Hall, editor of the Denver Post, told an API Seminar that a good headline "is a single, uncluttered thought that brings a story to life." He suggests this sequence for headline writers:

1. Edit the story carefully without too much headline thinking.

2. On a slip of paper, or at the top of the video-display copy, do two things:

a. Construct in your own words a short and simple sentence that sums up the news, then try to edit that statement into a headline that fits.

b. Write a "headline," without regard to count or the number of required lines, that will best sell the story. Then work it toward the kind of head that was ordered.

Charles A. King, then vice president of Ottaway Newspapers, gave an API Copy Editors Seminar this list of headline no-nos:

1. Misses the point of the story.

2. Inaccuracy.

3. Lack of clarity.

4. Bewildering initials or abbreviations.

5. Awkward or incorrect English.

6. Use of journalese.

7. Cuteness or sophistry.

8. Redundancy, padding.

9. Conjunctions, prepositions or modifiers at the end of a line.

Lee Hills typed these thoughts when he was editor at the Detroit Free Press:

—There is "sell" value in good, solid quotes. "My Jimmie Died Just 10 Minutes Ago" may, technically, be a second-rate head since it doesn't crowd in many "facts." But it got one of the highest readership scores ever recorded in a newspaper survey.

—Be aware of the value of "personal words" — often personal pronouns. Note them in "SHE Wears First Orchid as Pupils Bid Adieu" or "A Detroiter 40 Years, SHE Never Left Farm."

—The editor must never forget the pull of "family words." There is magic for readers in "Uncle," "Grandpa," "Dad," "Mother" and the like.

Carl Riblet, Jr., in his book "The Solid Gold Copy Editor":

The most wanted badman of head writing is the one whose lightning fast pencil is loaded with the word "said." That pencil must be destroyed in the name of clarity, good sense and good English at all cost, for it uses "said" for "said to be."

The advice above is timeless. You need master it only once; it is not likely to change.

Good headline writers have always been in short supply. May their tribe increase.

History Is Full of Good Headlines

Headline practice can make you a better all-around writer. It helps you learn to get to the nub of things, and to state large thoughts in a small number of words.

One good method is to have someone else clip a few representative stories from the daily paper, minus the headlines. Then try your own hand at headlining, and see whether yours are as good as the originals.

Or, you can put headlines on the high spots of your day: "Diligent Efforts Earn Merit Raise," or whatever. The high spots of history also make fine subjects, as you can see from these gems doodled on a slow afternoon at the New York Times a few years ago:

Noah Builds Ark;
Sees a Long Rain

Jehovah Resting
After 6-Day Task

Methuselah Dies;
Judean was 944

Tea Ship Is Sunk;
Indians Blamed

Moses, on Sinai,
Gets 10-Pt. Plan

World Is Round,
Genoan Declares

Guidelines for Cutlines

Few pictures are so self-explanatory that they need no words, and therein hangs many a sad tale.

You wouldn't let an out-of-focus photograph into your newspaper — but if all the out-of-focus cutlines were laid end to end they would encircle the Kodak factory hundreds of times.

Bad writing is at work there. So is bad editing.

Often the cutline writer (or the editor) didn't even see the photograph; it was described to him, or the photographer handed over a scrap of paper with some scrawled notes. Sometimes the cutline writer saw the picture, but the details didn't register. Sometimes the picture was seen, but later some of the details were cropped away. Or sometimes the cutline writer didn't read the accompanying story, and notice the discrepancies or redundancies between cutline information and story information.

The photographer must supply full and accurate cutline information. The editors have the responsibility after that.

Robert T. Barnard of the Louisville Courier-Journal, speaking at an API seminar, listed these six criteria for a good cutline:

1. *Brevity*. Too many lines of type repel the reader. If of necessity they get unwieldy, consider brief cutlines and an accompanying story.

2. *Clarity*. Leave no question in the reader's mind about what is in the picture and what is happening. Leave no mysterious object or special circumstance unexplained. Make clear the "when" and "where."

3. *Accuracy*. The lines have to tell what the picture shows, not what you think it should show. If two people are facing in opposite directions, the cutline can't say they are chatting.

4. *Readability*. Too many cutlines are written at the last minute and read that way. If the picture is worth 1,000 words, the cutline should be worth something too. Break up the long sentences, just as you would in a story.

5. *Eye appeal*. Typography can make the difference. If the type is too small, or has poor physical relationship to the picture, the reader has to grope.

6. *Imagination*. A nature picture can be just another cornfield to one cutline writer, a Wordsworthian challenge to another. Writers who can add dimension should be encouraged.

Richard H. Hartford, while news editor of the Evening Bulletin in Providence, wrote this list of suggestions:

1. Where there is bright or humorous dimension to the picture, reflect that tone in the cutline too.

2. Avoid questionable taste as diligently in the cutlines as you would in the

photo itself.

3. Don't load your cutlines with opinion, any more than you would a story.

4. Don't try to tell everything in the lines when a cut goes with a story.

5. When there is both cut and story, have the cutline and the headline written by the same editor to avoid duplication of ideas and wordings.

6. Don't, as a general rule, use collective lines covering more than one cut; each good picture deserves its own cutline.

7. Be consistent. In the news pages one cutline style should prevail.

Thomas G. Fesperman of the Charlotte Observer had these thoughts:

1. Explain any action that the reader, on first glance, may misinterpret. Example: Are the two men hugging or wrestling?

2. Use present tense when describing action which is taking place in the picture right before the reader's eyes. Use past tense when giving additional facts which do not describe the action in the picture.

David Perdew, photo editor in Atlanta, wrote this guideline while he was still with the Rochester newspapers:

— Be informational. Cutlines can often be used — but seldom are — as a device to give extra information beyond that contained in the story. For instance, cutlines with a map of Poland might go beyond the accompanying story by pointing out Poland's strategic location in relation to the Sovet Union, or by summarizing its geographic features, ethnic makeup, size, population.

— Don't assume a person's emotion or state of mind. Beware of using a person's facial expression as justification for describing him as glum or confused or surprised.

— Be honest. Don't imply in a cutline that a photo is a "live" news photo when it really came from your library. Explain any unusual effects, such as the foreshortening created by use of a telephoto lens.

— Identify the people adequately. Say who's at right or left, if necessary. But don't overdo it. "President Reagan (left) . . ." can look dumb.

— Don't belabor the obvious. The cutline should interpret what the picture says, not repeat what it says. If the President is waving goodbye, we don't have to say "President Reagan waves goodbye." A better approach might be to use the opportunity to add some information, such as where he's going, why, when he'll be back. Don't use other dead or obvious verbs as the "action" in the photo. No-nos include such as "poses," "stands," "is shown," "is pictured," "looks," "smiles," "shakes hands." Avoid use of phony verbs that say people are doing one thing or another when all they're doing is posing.

How Stories Are Selected

Ask editors to show you their criteria for news selection, and you'll get blank looks.

Throughout the free world, there are no written formulations and no empirical guidelines for such purpose. Every editor selects the day's stories, and decides their length and placement, on a largely subjective basis.

Editors do, of course, have insight into what will interest readers in their communities. But those insights and imperatives are rarely distilled into writing; individual judgment is the main factor in what is selected. (NOTE: Authoritarian countries do have guidelines, but they are based only incidentally on news values.)

In a workshop exercise at API, news editors were given Associated Press and United Press International news budgets — the lists of major stories on that day's wires. The editors were then broken into small groups and asked to pick the top ten stories of the day in order. All six groups agreed on the same major event as top choice, but on the next nine places there was almost no agreement at all.

The editors were then asked this question: "If someone asked you to write a set of criteria for news selection, what elements would be most important?"

Again there was great diversity, but four major considerations emerged in this order:

1. Significance (in the sense of importance, impact, relevance, cost, scope, intensity).

2. Proximity.

3. Human interest (in its broad definition: personality, color, character, surprise, novelty, adventure, drama, memories, pastimes, fun/entertainment, relationships, conversationality).

4. Timeliness (newness, immediacy, originality).

These other factors were ranked somewhat lower:

—Public agenda (issues, questions, problems, controversies).

—Negatives (bad news).

—Positives (good news).

—Analysis, evaluation, meaning.

—Decisions, results, conclusions.

—Service, usefulness.

—Quality of writing.

About the Institute

The American Press Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to the continuing education and career development of newspaper men and women.

It holds more than 30 seminars annually, from September through mid-July. Most programs are for five or nine days, and are designed for experienced executives and staff members from all departments of newspapers.

Approximately 1,000 men and women, mostly from the United States and Canada, take part in the Seminars each year. About half are from newsrooms. The objectives for all are the same: To exchange information and techniques, to increase knowledge and skills, and to improve the quality of newspapers.

The Institute has two conference rooms, where Seminar members gather at huge oval tables. To guide the discussions, API brings in more than 300 experts each year from all over the continent.

The Institute was founded in 1946. At the urging of Sevellon Brown, then editor and publisher of the Providence (R.I.) Journal and Evening Bulletin, 38 newspapers formed a founding fund to cover an initial series of Seminars. Columbia University provided space in its Graduate School of Journalism Building, and each group was housed and fed on campus.

The idea flourished. Over the years, API's Seminar offerings tripled. In need of additional work space that could not be obtained at Columbia, the Institute built its own conference center in Reston, Virginia, and moved there in 1974.

As growth continued, API's Board of Directors decided in 1978 to expand the Reston building. A second conference room was completed in October 1980, enabling API to broaden its schedule by conducting two Seminars at the same time.

About two-thirds of API's annual operating revenue comes from Seminar tuition. The rest is from annual Sponsorship contributions by newspapers, interest earned on reserves and a modest endowment fund. Successful fund-raising campaigns paid for both the original building and the addition before construction was completed.

The Institute's Seminars are conducted by a professional staff of seven, all with extensive newspaper backgrounds.

In Gratitude

As Euripides said long ago, "Life has no blessing like a prudent friend."

The Institute was blessed with three special friends on this project:

• Richmond Newspapers, Inc. (the Times-Dispatch and News Leader) provided typesetting and composition. Executive Editor Alf Goodykoontz and Systems Editor David J. Chapin offered many fine suggestions.

• The American Newspaper Publishers Association, next-door neighbor to API in Reston, did the page pasteup.

• Edmund C. Arnold of Richmond, long a central figure in newspaper design and a Discussion Leader at API more than 200 times, provided invaluable conceptual guidance.